



## What is it?

### Points To Remember About Acne

- Doctors don't know what causes acne, but taking care of your skin can prevent outbreaks from becoming worse.
- Anyone can get acne, although it's most common in teens and young adults.
- Hormone changes during puberty, before a woman's monthly period, or after starting or stopping birth control can cause acne outbreaks.
- If you have severe acne, you may need to see a dermatologist, a type of doctor that specializes in treating skin problems.
- Avoid squeezing or picking at pimples to reduce the risk of scarring.

Acne is a disorder that affects the skin's oil glands and hair follicles. The small holes in your skin (pores) connect to oil glands under the skin. These glands make an oily substance called sebum. The pores connect to the glands by a canal called a follicle. Inside the follicles, oil carries dead skin cells to the surface of the skin. A thin hair also grows through the follicle and out to the skin. Sometimes, the hair, sebum, and skin cells clump together into a plug. The bacteria in the plug cause swelling. Then when the plug starts to break down, a pimple grows.

Most pimples are found on the face, neck, back, chest, and shoulders. Acne is usually not a serious health threat, but it can cause scars.

## Who gets it?

Anyone can get acne, but it is most common in teens and young adults. An estimated 80 percent of people between ages 11 and 30 have acne outbreaks at some point.

## What are the types?

There are many types of pimples. The most common types are:

- Whiteheads: pimples that stay under the surface of the skin.
- Blackheads: pimples that rise to the skin's surface and look black (the black color is not from dirt).
- Papules: small pink bumps that can be tender.
- Pustules: pimples that are red at the bottom and have pus on top.
- Nodules: large, painful, solid pimples that are deep in the skin.
- Cysts: deep, painful, pus-filled pimples that can cause scars.

## What causes it?

Doctors don't know what causes acne. Doctors think certain things play a part:

- Changing hormone levels.
- Taking certain medicines.
- Wearing greasy makeup.
- Heredity.

There are many myths about what causes acne. Dirty skin and stress do not cause acne. Also, chocolate and greasy foods do not cause acne in most people.

For those who have acne, some things can make it worse:

- Pressure from bike helmets, backpacks, or tight collars.
- Pollution and high humidity.
- Squeezing or picking at pimples.
- Hard scrubbing of the skin.
- Stress.

## How is it treated?

Over-the-counter or prescription drugs may treat acne by healing pimples, stopping new pimples from forming, and preventing scars. Some medicines are put right on the skin, while others are pills that you swallow.

## Who treats it?

Several types of health care professionals may treat acne, including:

- General or family physicians.
- Dermatologists, who treat skin problems.
- Internists, who diagnose and treat adults.
- Pediatricians, who diagnose and treat children.

## Living With It

Here are some ways to care for skin if you have acne:

- Clean skin gently. Use a mild cleanser in the morning, evening, and after heavy workouts. Scrubbing the skin does not stop acne; it can even make the problem worse.
- Try not to touch your skin. People who squeeze, pinch, or pick their pimples can get scars or dark spots on their skin.
- Shave carefully. If you shave, you can try both electric and safety razors to see which works best. With safety razors, use a sharp blade. It also helps to soften your beard with soap and water before putting on shaving cream. Shave lightly and only when you have to.
- Stay out of the sun. Many acne medicines can make people more likely to sunburn. Being in the sun a lot can also make the skin wrinkle and raise the risk of skin cancer.
- Choose makeup carefully. All makeup should be oil free. Look for the word “noncomedogenic” on the label. This means that the makeup will not clog up your pores. But some people still get acne even if they use these products.
- Shampoo your hair regularly. If your hair is oily, you may want to shampoo daily.

## Other Medical Problems

Pimples can cause scarring. To reduce the risk of scarring, get treatment early and avoid picking at pimples.

## For More Info

### **U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

Drugs@FDA at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. Drugs@FDA is a searchable

catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics**

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

**American Academy of Dermatology**

Website: <https://www.aad.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at [NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov).

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